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DE RUEHBC #0067/01 3651131  
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FM REO BASRAH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0956  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0994

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000067

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EWWT](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [EFIS](#) [PBTS](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAQI FISHERMEN HARASSED BY IRAN AND KUWAIT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3110  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3004  
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 1912

BASRAH 00000067 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: John Naland, PRT Team Leader, PRT Basra, US State Department.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (c)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Iraqi fishermen are bearing the brunt of conflicting claims by Iraq and its neighbors to territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. Media reports and personal accounts by fishermen, PRT members, US Navy personnel in the region, and a British naval officer familiar with the situation confirm repeated acts of intimidation and violence against Iraqi fishermen by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Navy and the Kuwaiti Navy and Coast Guard. While US and UK Navy training of the Iraqi Navy (IqN) is helping reduce some of the tensions in the Gulf, without accepted maritime boundaries, the Iranians and Kuwaitis will continue to enforce their territorial water claims to the detriment of Iraq's fishermen. End summary.

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Frustrated Fishermen Face Harassment  
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[1](#)2. (C) Recent PRT visits to al-Faw and off-shore oil terminals yielded personal accounts of what we see reported from time to time in the local media: harassment and intimidation of Iraqi fishermen by Iranian and Kuwaiti forces. Aqeel Salman, the chairman of the al-Faw Fisheries Association, which represents most of the 10,000 fishermen in southern Iraq, raised the issue with PRT members during one visit. He reported that Iranian and Kuwaiti forces routinely harass and intimidate fishermen in what he viewed as international waters in the Persian Gulf. Salman said that fishermen were being harassed and mistreated. He related instances of Iraqi fishing boats being fired upon, having their nets cut and equipment thrown overboard, and being confiscated. He knew of seven boats being held by Iran, and four by Kuwait. The chairman said both the national and provincial governments were well aware of the situation, and criticized them for failing to engage the Iranians and Kuwaitis to defend Iraqi fishermen's rights. (Note: Basrah Governor Shiltagh confirmed to us that he knows of the problem, but said he has no authority to act since the central government is responsible for international issues. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) Lieutenant Commander Stephen Banfield, a British naval officer currently stationed with the British Consulate in Basrah, confirmed that conflicting national claims by Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait to the Gulf's waters has led to repeated challenges to Iraq's vessels by its neighbors. He verified that both the Kuwaiti Navy and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Navy (not the Iranian Navy) routinely board Iraqi fishing boats that

enter their claimed territorial waters. (Note: Prior to Basrah, LTC Banfield worked for the Bahrain-based United Kingdom Maritime Component Commander and Combined Task Force Iraqi Maritime (CTF-IM), both which assist the IqN and Iraqi Marines in safeguarding their territorial waters and defending their offshore oil platforms. End note.) Banfield said that on an average day, there are up to 500 Iraqi fishing boats in this part of the Persian Gulf. They often lack GPS or other geographic positioning equipment, and tend to follow the schools of fish, sometimes into disputed waters. Banfield added that, like most countries, both the Kuwaitis and Iranians are very strict about protecting their claimed territorial waters, and that the Iranians tend to be much more heavy-handed than the Kuwaitis in challenging Iraqi fishermen. Banfield said that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Navy would open fire on Iraqi boats if they fail to stop for boarding after receiving three warnings.

¶4. (C) U.S. Navy Commander Chip Wrye, Executive Officer, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission at the IqN HQ in Umm Qasr, told PRTOffs that encounters between the Kuwaiti Navy and Coast Guard and Iraqi fishermen have been occurring on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis for many years. Such encounters typically range from verbal harassment to beatings and seizure/destruction of equipment. LTC Wrye said that IqN sources indicate that the overwhelming majority of harassment/violence toward Iraqi fishermen has occurred at the hands of the Kuwaiti Coast Guard, and generally been to the north and west of Iraq's off-shore Al Basrah Oil Terminal (ABOT). LTC Wrye said that the latest incident occurred in November 2009, when two Iraqi fishermen were severely beaten and required hospitalization. (Note: LTC Wrye noted, however, that that the overwhelming majority of information regarding such incidents has come as a result of reporting by the fisherman themselves to the IqN, not from any thorough Iraqi military investigations. End note.)

¶5. (C) As for conflicts with Iran, Commander Wrye said that IqN HQ reports that Iraqi fishermen have been similarly harassed for years, to include beatings, shootings, robbery, and bribery by Iranian military and police. (Note: Wrye did not specify which

BASRAH 00000067 002.2 OF 002

Iranian forces were involved. End note.) The number of incidents involving Iranian forces reported by Iraqi fishermen to the IqN, however, has traditionally been much less than the reports involving Kuwaitis. According to LTC Wrye, this disparity does not necessarily mean that there are fewer incidents. Most incidents involving Iranians occur on or near the inlet to the Shatt Al Arab, an area patrolled by the Iraqi Coastal Border Guard (CBG), the latter which Wrye said traditionally does not share information with the IqN.

¶6. (C) Wrye also said that as recently as about July 2009, US Navy personnel have directly witnessed Iranian aggression towards Iraqi fishermen. While on a training mission in the vicinity of Iraq's off-shore Khor Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT), an Iraqi patrol boat with US Navy personnel on board, received a request for assistance from an Iraqi fishing dhow. Upon arrival, US Navy personnel observed numerous bullet holes in the dhow's wheelhouse, deck, and a pump. The fishermen said that an Iranian military patrol boat had approached, accused the crew of fishing in Iranian waters, and fired numerous AK-47 rounds into the vessel. Although no Iraqi fishermen were wounded, the dhow required a tow back to shore. Although the IqN believes that similar harassment of Iraqi fishermen by Iranian forces continues, it continues to receive only periodic reports of such incidents. A more complete source of information could probably be provided by the Iraqi CBG.

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Training, Communication Helps Reduce Tensions  
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¶7. (C) To help diffuse the tensions in the Gulf, the United States and British Royal Navy have been providing training to the Iraqis (ref A) at the IqN HQ at Umm Qasr, under the command

of Multi National Security Transition Command-Iraq. This mission is for training only, and except in the case of emergency or otherwise directed by the MNF-I Commander, personnel are forbidden from participating in any operations. One training success has been the establishment of daily lines of communications between the Iraqi and Kuwaiti navies, which allows them to coordinate activities in the Persian Gulf and minimize surprises. As for the Iranians, there is little engagement or cooperation. US forces maintain a buffer zone around KAAOT, which lies within waters claimed by both Iraq and Iran, and which trans-ship only a limited volume of Iraq's southern exports.

18. (C) Possibly as a result of assisting in greater Iraqi-Kuwaiti lines of communication, and to address this serious November 2009 incident above, Commander Wrye said that in late November, IqN Chief of Staff Captain Abdul Wahid asked for a meeting with his Kuwaiti Navy counterpart (Captain Abdullah Dashti), regarding the treatment of Iraqi fishermen by the Kuwaiti forces. Although no Kuwaiti Coast Guard personnel attended the meeting, since this meeting, Wrye said that no incidents between any Kuwaiti military forces (Navy or Coast Guard) and Iraqi fishermen have been reported. According to Wrye, this apparent improved situation could have also been the result of a Kuwaiti request that the IqN intercept any and all Iraqi fishermen that approach a certain defined limit, and direct them back to undisputed territorial waters.

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Comment  
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19. (C) The dispute over territorial waters is a long-standing issue (ref B). While US and UK Navy training of the IqN is helping reduce some of the tensions in the gulf, until clear boundaries are settled, and with all parties willing to observe them, the Iranians and Kuwaitis could continue to enforce their claims to the detriment of Iraq's fishermen.  
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